


Planners target expressways now clogged 5½ hours a day

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Congestion pricing, special lanes for trucks, more technology and possibly tolls could be in the future for the region's expressways, planners said Thursday.

The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning is drafting a proposal to create a "vision" for transportation that will be released for public comment in April.

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"It's about taking a comprehensive, holistic look at the entire expressway network and treating (expressways) more as transportation corridors," CMAP Executive Director Joseph Szabo said.

The project was undertaken at the behest of the Illinois tollway and Illinois Department of Transportation. Among the priorities will be 10- to 15-mile corridors along the Kennedy, Stevenson and Dan Ryan expressways, Szabo said.

Local highways are clogged for about 5½ hours each weekday, which costs billions in lost productivity, fuel and pollution, CMAP estimates.

Among the ideas being considered are congestion pricing, where drivers pay to use an express lane, or managed lanes, which could include carpool-only lanes.

Planners also wondered about expanding the "SmartRoad" concept on the Jane Addams Tollway (I-90), which features digital signs that give real-time traffic information and move traffic into specific lanes in cases of crashes.

Technology that detects breakdowns or accidents along with strategic patrols could improve congestion by speeding up recovery time, Szabo said.

Another idea is offering lanes specifically for trucks to separate the bigger vehicles from passenger cars.

Transit will be incorporated into the plan as Szabo favors Pace's growing network of express buses that include new routes on I-90.

"There are opportunities to ramp that up," he said.

Another focus is to alleviate crowding on the CTA's Blue Line to O'Hare.